

Due to the generosity of three of my cousins, we have been hosting a quail hunt for the athletic staff of a large southern university. My open-hearted relatives graciously invited every adult the college had who owned a letter sweat shirt and snap-billed cap to move into the ranch house.

Coaches and sub-coaches fill every room. The smallest guest present weighs more than a brick chimney. To do this column, I've had to hold my typewriter like you do a plate at one of those fancy buffet style dinners. Typewriters don't have a tilt switch, or I'd be using a ball point. I know now how a young oyster feels the first time he closes his shell. I haven't been this pressed for room since I rode a train up in New York.

Southern people make the worst guests you can have on your outfit. Their life style is nerve wrecking. Out in the pasture, they let half the birds get away, trying to give everyone a chance to shoot. Around the house, they drive you crazy serving refreshments and passing food amongst the people gathered.

Emily Post must have a big following down in the country. Good manners, I thought, were for kids showing off in front of their school teachers or their grandparents, and 1971 seemed like the time for folks to forget all that outdated etiquette and start shoving and pushing each other around. I don't know how these fellows ever teach a football player to use his elbows for anything but to put a bandage on. They're so careful to step back out of your way that they must wear out their reverse gears before they're 40 years old.

The instigators of the hunt have been acting nice, too. They've been hunting for two days, shot six rounds apiece, and have only claimed about two dozen birds. On other hunts, I've watched the three of them shoot less than six-bits worth of shells and end up with their game sacks full. Having these sporting gentlemen from the university around has improved their conduct a full 500 points. If our family had the money, I believe it'd be worth it to send all three cousins down south for a polishing job. I know one thing for certain. It wouldn't hurt anything to send them down there.

For college men, those football wranglers sure are dumbheads. They said that back at their homeland the temperature was 80 degrees. Since the hunt started, our mid-afternoon readings have barely got into the 20s. Morning chill indexes have run below zero. Shortgrass weather conditions have been more conducive to dry-trailing caribou than running wild birds.

Holding a coaching job must not teach an hombre to know when he's well off. Looks to me like flushing alligators from a warm swamp would be far superior to chasing quail across frozen grounds. Being involved in the glamour of the gridiron must either destroy men's judgment or ruin their thermostats. You could put together an army of Shortgrassers who'd like to spend the winter in a temperate zone, and once they'd moved, you wouldn't have to worry about them coming back to hunt quail or anything else that lives in the desertlands. I've heard of transplanted people getting homesick for the Shortgrass Country, but I've yet to meet one.

The game department is threatening to extend the hunting season, so the game won't die from the drouth. Merit can be found in granting a merciful death for the grass starved creatures, but I do hope they'll check with my relatives and see how much more hunting they have planned for me. The foundation of this ranch house wouldn't stand many more of this size customers.